

I Choose You

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Category: Law and Order: SVU

Genre: Drama, Family

Language: English

Characters: Noah B., O. Benson

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-15 07:48:22

Updated: 2016-04-19 00:00:30

Packaged: 2016-04-27 16:40:34

Rating: T

Chapters: 2

Words: 7,263

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: What if baby Noah had a sister out there that suddenly becomes a special victim and surprises her way into Olivia Benson's life?

1. Save You

It's 2 a.m. and they are still going at it. Lauren was sent to her room hours ago and since then all she's heard is her foster parents screaming at each other. Lauren is laying down in her bed; her comforter covering her body and face. She tries to block out the noise, but the walls are too thin. It's no secret that fists are being thrown. Her foster mother is covered with new bruises every morning and doesn't even bother to hide them. It's not like she leaves the house anymore. Lauren barely even goes to school, just so her foster mom doesn't have to be seen. Lauren's been here for almost a year now, and surprisingly, it's one of the better ones despite the yelling and hitting every night. She at least gets a meal at this one.

At ten years-old, Lauren Brooke Porter has been through some pretty horrific things that no little girl should ever have to go through. Before being put in the system at three years-old, Lauren was passed around through different kinds of unusual people, in and out of different states, until finally being put in the system after being found abandoned in a hospital in New York City with just a note with her name on it. No one ever claimed her, nor did anyone ever find the people that abused her. Abuse was definitely was and still is a factor in Lauren's life. She has yet to find a good home that didn't come with beatings, being starved, punishments, or sexual favors. Lauren can't even remember the last time she was able to truly be a kid. Since she was able to walk Lauren's been taking care of everyone around her. She learned to cook at four. She started walking to school as soon as she was able to go. She's been cleaning since she could walk. No one's ever taken care of Lauren, and Lauren isn't sure if that'll ever change.

Hours later at Mercy Hospital, Lieutenant Olivia Benson and Detective Amanda Rollins are walking down the hall with Doctor Matthews.

"Ten year old girl. Multiple bruising and scarring covering her body. She's malnourished. Seems, as if, she hasn't had a decent meal in years. Thankfully we caught this now because there may not have been a later." Dr. Matthews explains.

"Has she-" Olivia could never bring herself to say those dreadful words whenever it came to children in these cases.

Dr. Matthews nods her head, confirming. "Sadly, yes. Nothing too recent, but to my guess, it has been a constant factor in her life. We are running DNA right now to see if there are any matches out there."

They stop at Lauren's door and sneak a peek in the window at her lying in bed. An eleven year old who looks barely eight, Olivia thought. These cases are never easy.

"Has she said anything to anyone?" Amanda asks.

"She's very vocal." Dr. Matthews confirms. "Seems very grown and mature. You shouldn't have any issues with this one." She smirks. "We're going to keep her here for a few more days; try to bring her weight up."

"Thanks." Olivia smiles and looks back at Lauren as Dr. Matthews walks away.

"Ready?" Amanda asks.

"Am I ever?" Olivia shoots her a smile before walking into the hospital room. The detectives take notice at how exhausted and small Lauren looks as she lays in bed. A case that concerns a child is never easy no matter how many times you do it. Her brown hair comes down in waves to the middle of her back and her bright green eyes look up when she hears the door open. Olivia lets out a little gasp as she stared at Lauren. There's something familiar about her-like she's seen her before. "Hi, Lauren. I'm Lieutenant Olivia Benson and this is Detective Amanda Rollins. But you can just call us Olivia and Amanda." Lauren smiles slightly and nods.

"How are you feeling, honey?" Amanda asks. She stands off to the side of Lauren's bed as Olivia sits on the edge.

"I'm okay." Lauren says, softly.

"Sweetheart, do you want to tell us what happened last night?" Olivia asks cautiously.

Lauren looks down and begins playing with a loose thread from the blanket covering her. "My foster parents were fighting. And I guess they were really loud and neighbors called the police."

"Do you know what they were fighting about?" Amanda asks.

Lauren shrugs. "I'm not sure. When they start fighting, I cover my ears."

Olivia and Amanda glance at each other. "Do they fight often?"

"Yes." Lauren nods. "Every night."

"Lauren, have they ever hurt you in any way?" Olivia asks. They see a tear fall down Lauren's pale cheek. "It's okay, sweetie. You can tell us."

Lauren finally looks back up at them, clearly frightened. "I don't want to get them in trouble. I haven't been in a good foster home until now. Please don't make me go back to the group home." She cries.

Olivia bends down slightly, catching Lauren's eyes. She needed Lauren to see that she can trust her. "What makes them good, Lauren?"

Lauren looks at Amanda and Olivia, unsure if she can really trust them. She didn't want to go back to the group home. "I have a bed and they let me eat after I do my chores." Lauren shrugs.

"Well, that does sound good, but Lauren, do you understand why you are in the hospital?" Lauren looks back down and shrugs. "You have some bruising and you're very malnourished. Do you know what that means?" Lauren nods.

"And that also means that your foster parents have been hurting you." Amanda adds.

Lauren's head shoots up and she glares at the two women in front of her. "You don't know anything about me!" She practically yells. "I'm not going back to the group home! You can't make me!"

"Lauren-" Olivia goes to grab Lauren's hand, but she moves away.

"I don't want to talk anymore." Lauren tells them before turning her back to them.

Not wanting to push her, Olivia and Amanda walk out of the room, stopping in the hallway. "Visit to the home?" Amanda assumes.

"Let's go." Olivia says before they walk away.

At the home of Lauren's foster parents, Olivia and Amanda walk into the run down house. There's boxes of random things scattered throughout every room.

"It's safe to say why she's always sick." Amanda says, looking around at the clutter.

Olivia walks into the kitchen and begins looking through the fridge, pantry, and cabinets. "There's barely any food. Who in the world does these visits and how has Lauren been here for a year?"

"Uh, Liv." Amanda calls out from one of the rooms.

Olivia follows her voice down the hallway and walks into the room Amanda is in. "Lauren's room?"

"If you call a cot in the corner of the room with junk surrounding her, then sure." Amanda says sarcastically, both sick at what they've walked into. They start looking through everything, but they already know that Lauren wasn't coming back. And they were also going to make sure the foster parents are arrested for their neglect. Olivia was going to make sure of it.

Later that night, Olivia called the hospital to check on Lauren. Lauren hadn't said a word since Olivia and Amanda left there hours ago. She fell asleep not too long ago and for some reason that made Olivia feel better. Just knowing Lauren is asleep, in a safe place, getting the treatment that she needs, made Olivia breathe a little better. She felt some sort of connection to the young girl the moment she layed eyes on her, though.

But with Lauren still on her mind, Olivia went home to spend time with her two year-old son Noah. The adoption became official last year, and Olivia has never felt happier. With everything the little boy has been through, he was still thriving as if nothing ever happened to him and Olivia couldn't be more grateful for his innocence and lack of memory.

While she sits on the couch, reading to her baby boy, there's a knock at the door. Olivia looks confused considering what time it is. Praying it isn't work, Olivia picks Noah up and walks over to the door, opening it.

"Melinda?" Olivia says, sounding surprised to see her friend who is an M.E. at her door.

"Hi, Olivia." Melinda says, as Olivia lets her inside.

"Is there something wrong?"

"Well, that's up to you." Olivia frowns, looking confused. "I got Lauren's DNA test back."

"Oh, did you find any matches?"

"I did actually. I brought over her file for you." Melinda says, handing the folder over to Olivia.

"That's great. Hopefully we can get in touch with them tomorrow morning." Olivia opens the file.

"Well, you already have." Melinda says, mysteriously.

Olivia squints in confusion before looking through Lauren's file. She gasps and looks back up at Melinda. "What?"

"She's Noah's sister."

Olivia looks back down at the file then at her two year-old son, who has now fallen asleep on her shoulder. "How is that even possible?"

"They're full blood siblings. Seems like the mother had more secrets than what she was sharing." Melinda says. "What it looks like in her file, though, Lauren never knew her parents. As soon as she was born,

she was sent away, but not to a foster home. She didn't enter the system until she was three years-old. I think the mother gave her away to strangers before she was abandoned at a hospital here in New York. No one knows about what happened before then, but the scars and bruises they found pretty much gave it away."

Olivia was still in shock as she listened to Melinda. "Well, this explains why I felt a connection to her. I can't believe Noah has a sister."

"I figured you should know first. That's just a copy of her file, so don't worry about returning it." Before she walks out the door, Melinda turns back around to face Olivia who is still staring at the file she is holding. "Olivia, if you're feeling some sort of connection then there's a reason. Good luck."

Olivia looks up and gives Melinda a small smile. "Thank you for this, Melinda." Melinda nods and walks out, closing the door behind her. Olivia looks down at Noah, and can see Lauren in his face.

Well, Olivia thought she was going to be putting Noah to sleep and going to bed early herself, but no such thing. Now, she has a file to read and decisions to make. Knowing Noah has a sister changes everything.

Olivia stayed up half the night reading Lauren's file. In her ten years, Lauren has been through as much as an adult should never have to go through. But knowing that her son has a sister out there, she would never be able to live with herself if she let Lauren go especially if she let her go to another place that will hurt her. Noah has the right to know his sister and Lauren has the right to know her brother. There wasn't a question to what Olivia had to do.

As soon as Lucy, Olivia's nanny, showed up to watch Noah, Olivia's first stop on the way to the pricencnt was the hospital. It was still early so Olivia stayed outside Lauren's room, looking through the window at the sleeping girl when Dr. Matthews walks up to her.

"Lietenant Benson, nice to see you here so early." She smiles.

Olivia takes a deep breath. "I coudn't get her off my mind."

"That's good to know. Anything on the foster parents yet?"

"They're still in custody. I'm confident they'll be there a long time." Olivia tells her. "How was she last night?"

Dr. Matthews sighs. "Not good. She woke up with a few nightmares. Seemed pretty common because she'd ignore the nurses and try to fall right back to sleep. I think she's been having these nightmares for a long time. We may never truly know what happened unless Lauren tells us. Good luck in there." Olivia nods as Dr. Matthews walks away.

She walks in quietly, careful not to wake Lauren up. Even in her sleep Lauren looks exhausted. Olivia pulls up a chair and sits down next to Lauren's bed. Within that second of sitting down and looking at Lauren's pale and exhausted face, Olivia already knew her

answer.

Moments later, Olivia sits up when she sees Lauren's eyes start to open. Lauren wipes the sleep from eyes and squints through the blurriness at Olivia. The woman she met yesterday and the woman she thought she'd never see again.

"You're back." She says in a raspy voice. "Where's your friend?"

Olivia smirks. "I came by myself."

"Oh."

"I hear you had a rough night." Lauren shrugs. "Does that happen often?"

"Why are you here?" Lauren asks, ignoring Olivia's question.

"I came to check on you. Also, I went to your foster parents' home yesterday."

Lauren sits up. "Are my books still there?"

Olivia looks confused, but then remembers the stack of books she and Amanda found under Lauren's cot. "They are." She smiles. She sees Lauren let out a breath of relief. "Those are your books? They are some pretty big books for a little girl."

Lauren shrugs. "I like to read. Sometimes I don't go to school, so I try to make up for it." She explains.

"Why don't you go to school?"

"My foster parents didn't want to bring me. Sometimes my foster mom would have bruises and she didn't want anyone to see. I walked by myself for a long time until a teacher seen me and threatened my foster mom. She said I was too little to walk alone."

"She's right." Olivia agrees.

"Did you know people throw away books, like they're nothing. It isn't right."

"No, it isn't. But I will make sure myself that you get those books back."

Olivia could see that Lauren's mind is racing with questions to ask. She's curious to know which one will make it out of her mouth first. Lauren looks up and Olivia is a little surprised to see tears forming in her green eyes. "Please don't make me go to the group home. I know it's your job, but I can't go. I'll be good for my foster parents. I'll do everything they ask from me. I'll do my chores. I won't even read. Please, Olivia." Lauren begs, breaking Olivia's heart. "Please don't make me go there."

Olivia was speechless. Eventually when the silence became too much for Lauren to bare, she cried herself back to sleep. Olivia wanted to say so much. She wanted to tell Lauren everything, but she knew she couldn't until everything was written down on paper and a for sure

thing.

After Lauren had fallen asleep, Olivia wiped the leftover tears from Lauren's face with her thumbs and placed a small kiss on top of the girl's head before heading out. But she wasn't going to precinct. No. She was going to see Lauren's case worker.

Olivia went straight to family services after leaving the hospital. She found Lauren's case worker and explained everything. Surprisingly, Noah's case was well known around the office, but not knowing that he had a sister right under their noses confused them all. Lauren's case worker explained the difficulty Lauren has had since she came to them. She's a smart girl, but with missing school so much came with great difficulties. Her grades aren't where they should be for a sixth grader, and she's been in several fights with different kids at different schools. Lauren has broke her arm and her wrist numerous times. Her foster parents claiming she is just very clumsy, which she is, but not enough to break her arm and wrist numerous times within just a few months from each other. Eventually, Lauren got out of those homes, but only to be put in others with the same issues. No one ever got a straight answer as to the things that have happened to Lauren inside all those houses. Doctor visits confirmed the sexual assaults that have happened to her throughout her ten years, but no one truly knows what exactly happened behind the scenes, and that wasn't something Lauren was willing to speak about; at least not right now.

Thanking God that she was already approved to foster, Olivia was able to get all the paperwork done, and if things turn out well, she won't have to wait a year to adopt Lauren like she did with Noah. If it wasn't for the laws, she would have signed the papers immediately. Now that she has officially become Lauren's foster parent, the biggest part now is telling Lauren. Olivia decided to wait until Lauren was out of the hospital before breaking the news to her.

Olivia needed Lauren to trust her, or well trust her enough before telling her that she has a two year-old brother and that she will be fostered by her brother's adoptive mother. Olivia updated Lauren's doctors on everything and Dr. Matthews didn't see any problem discharging Lauren a little early considering she is now being fostered by a lieutenant from SVU and also someone who Dr. Matthews can already see cares so much about her.

At the precinct, Lauren walks in holding the hand of her case worker, Ashley. As soon as they come into view by the other detectives, Amanda is the first one to approach her. Olivia explained everything to them that morning, and they couldn't be happier for her. Surprised; but excited for Olivia and especially Noah and Lauren. They are both in a great home with a great mom there to protect them. They wouldn't be better anywhere else.

"Hi, Lauren. Do you remember me?" Amanda asks as she bends down in front of Lauren.

Lauren nods. "Amanda."

Amanda smiles. "That's right. Olivia is waiting for you in her office. How about I bring you and Ms. Ashley to her?" Lauren nods and they follow Amanda into Olivia's office. "Liv." Amanda calls

out.

Olivia looks up from her paperwork and smiles when she sees Lauren. "Hey, Lauren." She stands up and walks over to them as Amanda excuses herself.

"Am I in trouble?" Lauren asks right away.

Olivia and Ashley laugh, lightly. "Not at all, sweetie."

"Olivia and I just need to discuss a few things with you, okay?" Ashley tells her.

"Let's take a seat." Olivia leads them to the couch in her office while she sits on the coffee table in front of them.

"Am I going back to the group home?" Lauren asks.

"Let's just talk first." Ashley says, as she brushes a few stray hairs out of Lauren's face.

Olivia takes a deep breath before she begins. "Lauren, do you ever think about your real parents?" She asks.

Lauren thinks for a moment and shrugs. "Sometimes."

"Really? What do you think about?"

"Um, I think about what they look like. If they're dead. Or if they really wanted me, but died before they could take care of me so that's why I had to go away. Maybe I have a brother or sister. I don't know."

"Well, that's a lot to think about." Olivia says, a bit surprised. Lauren just shrugs, looking embarrassed. Olivia stands up and grabs the picture of Noah off her desk before sitting back down. She shows Lauren the picture. "Lauren, this is my little boy Noah. I adopted him last year."

Lauren looks surprised as she stares at the picture. "Really? He looks really happy."

"I like to think that he is." Olivia smiles.

"Lauren, Noah came from the same place you did." Ashley tells her.

"What do you mean?" She asks, looking confused.

"Well, I found Noah when he was just a few months old and living with some pretty bad people. I took him in and decided that I wanted to keep him, so I made everything official. Now, when I came to you in the hospital, I felt something familiar." Olivia explains. "Do you remember when the nurse took all that blood from your arm?" Lauren nods. "Well, your blood helped us find out a little more about you and where you come from."

"I was left with bad people, too?" Lauren asks.

Olivia nods slightly. "We think so." She says, softly. "Because your

blood matches with-" Olivia picks up Noah's picture. "-his. Which explains why I felt something familiar. Noah is your little brother, sweetheart." Lauren stares wide-eyed at the photo, letting the tears she's been holding back fall down her red cheeks.

"Lauren?" Ashley questions.

"They just gave him away, too?" Lauren asks, still looking at Noah's picture. "Why didn't they want us? What was wrong with us? Are they bad people, too?" Lauren asks, crying harder. She looks up at Olivia and Olivia could just see a little girl wanting answers, and those were answers she deserved to get.

Olivia looks at Ashley, who simply nods, giving her permission to explain everything. "Lauren, I met your parents when I first found Noah. I arrested your father and put him in jail. He was not a very good man. Later, I then found your mother and she was starting to get her life back in order so that she could raise Noah, but she died before she even got the chance."

"He killed her?" Lauren asks.

Olivia sighs, knowing this is too much for Lauren, but it was now or never. "He got someone else to. But, Lauren, I need you to understand that though you came from some pretty messed up people, you need to remember that your mother was trying to get herself better."

Lauren scoffs. "But she wasn't getting better for me. She was ten years too late." Lauren says, sounding a little too grown for both womens' liking. "She was trying for him." She says, pointing to Noah's picture. "She forgot all about me. No one would have ever known anything about me if it wasn't for my foster parents. No one wanted me. They just kept giving me away." She cries.

Olivia gets on her knees, in front of Lauren, and lifts the little girl's chin to look at her. "What if I wanted you?"

Lauren rolls her eyes as more tears escape. "You don't even know me."

"But I want to. I want to know everything about you, Lauren. You deserve someone who can take care of you and love you. And you deserve to know your little brother and he deserves to know his big sister. I told him about you." Olivia smirks as Lauren cries harder at the thought of her brother.

"Really?"

"Really. Would you like to meet him? He's in the next room." Lauren nods and grabs Olivia's hand, following her into the next room linked to Olivia's office. When they walk in, Noah is sitting on the floor playing with his toys. Lucy, their nanny stands up and walks over to them. "Lauren, this is Lucy. She helps me take care of Noah when I'm at work."

"Hey, Lauren." Lucy smiles.

"Hi." Lauren says, shyly.

Olivia walks over and kneels down next to Noah, placing a kiss on top

of his head. "Hey, little man. I want you to meet your big sister Lauren. Lauren this is Noah."

"Hi, Noah." Lauren sits down next to him.

Noah grabs a book and hands it to Lauren. "Looks like he wants you to read to him." Olivia tells her with a smile.

Lauren smirks. "I can do that."

While she begins to read, Noah sits next to her, listening intently to his sister read to him, leaning closely. Olivia walks over to where Ashley and Lucy are watching. "Looks like they love each other already." Ashley tells her.

Olivia chokes back her tears as she smiles proudly at the two children in front of her. Just like with Noah, Olivia already loves Lauren, and hopes that Lauren will be able to feel just the same soon. She wouldn't be able to see her life with the little girl who stole the other part of her heart.

2. One Step At A Time

A lot has happened in one day. Lauren met her little brother that she didn't know existed. They took a very quick liking to one another. Olivia could sense a sudden form of protection Lauren now felt towards Noah. And Olivia felt a sudden form of protection for the both of them. She suddenly couldn't see her future without Lauren being apart of it and couldn't be happier that she was taking her home. Though, the extra room in the apartment wasn't set up for a kid, Olivia made sure to get bookshelves in there first and foremost for all of Lauren's books, and throw some paint and other things to make it Lauren's room later on.

Lauren has been in many homes the last ten years of her life. A few of them she doesn't want to remember, but her brain refuses to let her forget, so being in another home was just like any other time for her. Olivia was desperate to prove to Lauren how different this time would be for her.

After spending a couple more hours at the precinct, Olivia was able to bring them home. She and Ashley had to discuss a few things and fill out more paperwork before they were able to leave. But as soon as they were finished, Ashley gave what little clothing Lauren had with her to Olivia, she relieved Lucy, and brought both kids home with her. Everything had gone well. Olivia showed Lauren around, made them dinner. Lauren didn't talk unless Olivia was asking her something. Olivia knew that there were many rules Lauren had to follow growing up in several of those homes. Rules that Olivia was determined to break. It seems that, among many others, speaking unless spoken to was one of them.

When it came time to get ready for bed, Lauren helped Olivia bathe Noah. Lauren even cracked a smile when Noah splashed her with water, making Olivia sigh happily as she watched the two interact. She knew being siblings, the two were going to have their many battles, but in their short time watching them spend one on one time with one another, Olivia could tell they were going to be best friends despite the age difference.

While Olivia put Noah to bed, Lauren went to get ready for bed herself. She showered, and for the first time actually felt cleaner than she ever did. Some of the homes she's been in rarely had clean water, so sometimes Lauren didn't bathe because there was no point. Lauren could already tell, though, that Olivia's apartment is nothing like any other home she's ever been in. But that doesn't mean she feels different about the situation. She doesn't know Olivia, though she seems nice, people change. That's something Lauren was used to.

As Lauren settled into bed, Olivia strolled in with a small smile on her face, as she sat on the edge of the bed. She explained to Lauren that she's right across the hall if she needs anything. To not be afraid to need her, but Lauren simply nodded and turned her back. Olivia knew this was all going to take some time to get used to for the both of them. It won't always be easy. Later that night proved her right.

Olivia jumped up from her sleep. She could hear screaming coming from across the hall. She jumps out of her bed and runs into Lauren's room. Lauren is still laying in bed, but she is kicking and covering her ears while she yells and cries.

"Lauren." Olivia says in a panic. "Lauren!" Olivia runs over to Lauren and removes the covers. She grabs ahold of Lauren's legs to stop her from kicking. "Lauren! Wake up, sweetheart!" Lauren opens her eyes and sits up, out of breath, tears streaming down her face. "Hey, you're okay. It's okay." Olivia repeats as she brushes Lauren's hair out of her face.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry." Lauren repeats over and over again. She tries to back herself into the wall behind her, shielding her face. Olivia's heart was breaking into pieces as she watches Lauren hide herself from her as if Olivia is going to hit her. So used to it happening all her life. "I'm sorry." She continues to cry.

Olivia reaches her arms out and gently touches Lauren on her arms, feeling her flinch under her touch. "Lauren. Sweetheart, it's Olivia. You're safe here, remember? No one is going to hurt you." Lauren slowly moves her arms away from her face. "There ya go." Olivia smiles. "No one is going to hurt you. You're safe here."

"Olivia?" Lauren whispers.

"It's me. I promise." Lauren crawls closer and Olivia catches her just as she jumps into Olivia's awaiting arms.

"I'm sorry." Lauren cries harder.

"Shhh." Olivia says, holding her tight and rubbing her back gently. "Don't be sorry. You're okay. I promise." Olivia can feel Lauren shaking. "How about we go in my bed and I can make sure those bad dreams don't come back. Okay?" Lauren nods against Olivia's shoulders. Olivia was just glad Lauren was trusting her right now. She picks Lauren up easily and brings her to her room. She lays her down on the bed and gets in on the side of her. Lauren is looking around, clearly too frightened to close her eyes again. "I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere, I promise. Just close your eyes." Lauren slowly closes her eyes, obviously exhausted from not only her

dream, but the last eleven years of her life, and rests her head against Olivia's shoulder. Olivia wraps an arm around the small girl. If she wasn't certain before that she wanted Lauren; she was definitely certain now.

The rest of their night consisted of Olivia soothing Lauren through her nightmares. Thankfully, able to calm her down without her actually waking up. Olivia had finally fallen asleep after two hours, and when she had woke up Lauren wasn't on the side of her. Curiosity got the best of her and Olivia went searching for her new foster daughter. She went to Lauren's room, but it was empty. So, she walked further down the hall only to find Lauren sitting on Noah's small bed with him beside her as she reads him a book. Olivia smiles slightly as she walks in listening to Lauren read perfectly for someone who barely went to school.

Lauren looks up and quickly shuts the book. "I'm sorry." She says, nervously.

Olivia scrunches her brows looking confused. "What are you sorry for, honey?" Olivia walks closer and kneels down in front of them. Noah jumps into her arms, happily, making Olivia laugh. "It's okay to read to your brother."

"He was up. I didn't want to wake you." Lauren tells her, watching Olivia's every move.

"No. I'm so glad you kept him company while I was sleeping. Thank you." Olivia says, sincerely. She really needed the extra couple hours of sleep.

"You're welcome."

"How would you like to help me make breakfast?" Olivia asks.

"Together?"

"Of course." Olivia smiles. "I need all the help I can get." She jokes.

"Okay!" Lauren says, with a bit of excitement. She jumps off Noah's bed and runs out the room. Olivia could only laugh as she hugs Noah closer and follows Lauren out.

While Noah is playing with his toys in the living room, Lauren is sitting on the counter in the kitchen mixing up the ingredients Olivia just poured inside the big bowl.

"I never had pancakes before." Lauren admits.

Olivia starts helping Lauren mix the contents. "Really?"

"Yeah. I've made them before, though, for other people."

Olivia decided to take this opportunity to try to get something from Lauren's past out of her. She needed to know exactly what this little girl has gone through. "What people, Lauren?"

Lauren shrugs. "The other people I had to live with. I had to make

them stuff and if I was lucky they would let me have some. But I never had pancakes."

"Lauren, how old were you when you started to cook?" Olivia asks.

Lauren thinks for a long moment. "I think I was four. I had a foster sister who showed me."

Olivia sets the bowl aside and stands in front of her Lauren. "Then how about I do this and you can just keep me company. How does that sound?" Lauren smiles, shyly, and nods. Olivia continues mixing while Lauren watches. "So, how old was your foster sister who taught you how to cook?"

Lauren shrugs. "I don't know. I was really little. I don't remember much. I think she was ten or eleven."

"Do you remember how long you stayed there?"

Lauren looks down, suddenly closing herself off. "I think I'm going to go play with Noah now." She hops off the counter and walks into the living room where her brother is.

Olivia sighs. She's disappointed in herself. Maybe she asked questions too soon, or Lauren is just more traumatized than she thought. Either way, Olivia knew she had to get something from Lauren's past one way or another. She had to speak up. The nightmares may never go away, nor will she be able to try to live her life normally if she doesn't talk about it. Olivia had to get Lauren to trust her if they were ever going to form a relationship.

After breakfast, they all got ready for their day. Olivia wasn't sure what she had planned, but she knew that she needed to get Lauren more clothes and things for her room. While Olivia is getting everything together for their trip out, there is a knock on the door. Lauren turns away from the t.v. and watches the door carefully, thinking at any time a social worker could be there to take her away. Olivia opens the door and Carisi and Amanda are there to greet her.

"Hey, guys!" Olivia smiles, letting them in. Carisi comes in holding a box and Amanda has a bag in her hands. "Lauren, you remember Amanda and Carisi from the precinct." Lauren nods, shyly.

Carisi kneels down, setting the box down on the floor. "But you can call me Sonny. BUT only you." Olivia and Amanda rolls their eyes and laugh.

"Lauren, we stopped by your old place and picked up your things." Amanda tells her.

Lauren looks into the box and sees her books. "My books!" She jumps up with a huge smile on her face.

"Well, if I knew all this time books would get her to smile, I would have just bought books for her." Olivia jokes.

"Can I go put my books on your bookshelf before we leave?" Lauren asks, looking up at Olivia.

Olivia smirks. "Yes. You can go put your books on your bookshelf." She emphasizes the word your. Olivia knows it's going to take some time for Lauren to believe that she isn't leaving here and that these things are hers.

"Let me help you with this." Carisi grabs the box and follows Lauren to her room.

"How are things going?" Amanda asks.

Olivia shakes her head and sits down on the couch; Amanda follows. "She was up most of the night with nightmares. I'm not sure if she even slept long because by the time I got up, I found her reading a book to Noah in his room."

"Did she tell you what the nightmares were about?" Amanda asks.

"No. But while she was helping make breakfast, she mentioned a foster home and started telling me about her foster sister who taught her how to cook when she was four."

"Four? Wow."

"Yeah. I know. But once I started to ask more questions about the home and how long she stayed there, she ran off."

"She'll come around, Liv. That little girl has been through more than any of us. She'll eventually trust you. How could she not?" Amanda smiles as Carisi walks back in.

"Do all ten year-old girls get excited over books?" He asks, looking confused.

"Just the really special ones." Olivia says, laughing along with Amanda.

"We also brought over Lauren's clothes that were there. I'm honestly not sure if they are even worth salvaging." Amanda tells her.

"It's okay. We are actually heading out to go get some things for her. I need to make her room her own. I think every time she takes a breath she believes she is leaving soon." Olivia tells them.

"I think putting those books on that bookshelf is one step closer to her believing." Carisi says. Olivia nods, agreeing. "We better get going. Even though our boss isn't there, I don't want her thinking we're slacking off." He jokes.

Olivia rolls her eyes. "Baby steps, Liv." Amanda tells her as she follows Carisi to the door.

"Thanks, you guys." Olivia waves as she watches them leave. She checks on Noah real quick, who is still content with his toys, before going to Lauren's room. When she walks in she finds Lauren sitting on the floor with all her books surrounding her. "Hey. I thought those books were supposed to go on the shelf, not the floor." Olivia smiles.

Lauren turns to Olivia as she sits down. "I had to make sure they were all here. They are." Lauren confirms.

"Well, how about we go do our shopping then when we get back, I'll put Noah down for his nap and we can set up your room just how you like it."

"We don't have to. It's okay." Lauren says, kindly.

Olivia sighs. She grabs the book, gently, away from Lauren and sets it aside before she scoots closer, looking very serious. "Lauren, I promise you, baby, you are not going anywhere. This is your room. This is your home."

Tears begin to form in Lauren's green eyes. "You can't make promises."

"And why not?"

"They don't exist." She says, simply.

Olivia rests her hand on the side of Lauren's cheek and wipes a stray tear away. "I would never lie to you." Lauren just stares at Olivia, looking so lost and unsure. "Come on. Let's go." Olivia smiles softly.

It's been an hour since they made it to the mall. Olivia was strolling Noah while Lauren held on to the side, watching Olivia rummage through the clothes on the rack. She's never had her own clothes before. They've always been hand-me-downs, and never the right size. So, this was all very new to her.

"Olivia?" Lauren speaks up for the first time since they arrived.

"Hm?" Olivia says, focusing on the shirt in her hands. She's been measuring Lauren from top to bottom since they went into the first store. Lauren's got so used to it, now she just stands still and barely even notices Olivia doing it anymore.

"Why don't you have kids of your own?"

Olivia freezes, trying to think of something to say. This kid has been surprising her with the random questions since she brought her home. "Um, I do." Olivia gives her a quick smile.

"I don't mean us." Lauren tells her.

Olivia lets out a breath and turns fully to Lauren. "Well, I hadn't found a great man to share that part of my life with and also work took up most of my time. I just didn't have the time." She says, honestly.

"But aren't you the boss at the police station?"

"I am. Which is why I am here with you."

"So you get to do what you want?"

"Not exactly." Olivia smirks. She gets eye leveled with Lauren as an idea pops into her head. "Since you are suddenly interested in asking me questions, how about we play a game. After you ask me a question,

I'll ask you a question."

Lauren slowly turns away. "Okay. I'll stop."

Olivia laughs. "That's what I thought."

After an hour of shopping and getting somewhat of everything Lauren may need, Olivia decided for them to head back home seeing as both kids were growing restless. When they got home, Olivia carried a sleeping Noah into his room for a nap, and Lauren ran to her room remembering that Olivia said they could put her books up on the bookshelf when they got home.

While Lauren is looking through each of her books, one by one, Olivia walks in causing Lauren to jump as she stares wide eyed at her new foster mother. Olivia notices and quickly sits down next to her.

"Hey. It's just me. I'm sorry I scared you." Olivia apologizes.

"Do you want to help me?" Lauren asks, ignoring Olivia's apologies.

Olivia smirks. "Of course I want to help you." They begin to put each book on the shelf one by one. Olivia desperately wanted to ask Lauren questions about her past, but she didn't have the heart to mess up what they had going right now. She couldn't risk Lauren pushing her away again. So, she watched Lauren carefully place each book in a row on the shelf. "Lauren, have you read all of these books?" Olivia notices that some of the books were way ahead of Lauren's age group.

Lauren nods. "Yes."

"You must be a very smart little girl." Olivia praises. "Not many kids your age like to read."

Lauren shrugs. "You can't take a lot with you to foster homes. But Ashley always let me keep them. I used to have a lot more, but some kids at the group home found them and tore them up." She says, sadly.

Olivia thanks God for giving her something of Lauren's past. An understanding of why she cried desperately not to return back to the group home. "Well, I'm so glad we found a forever home for them." Lauren smiles slightly and returns to her books. Not long after they had finished placing all the books perfectly on the shelves, it was lunch time. "How about I make us some lunch?"

Lauren's face drops in a look of horror. "I'm not allowed."

Olivia furrows her brows in confused. "What do you mean?"

"I can only eat once. That's what they told me."

Olivia lets out a sigh. "Lauren, what those people told you was not right. Little girls like you need food. And not just once a day. You can get sick if you don't eat enough, and I really don't want you to get sick because then you will miss out on so much. So, how about we start over? Lets not worry about what those other people told you. I

want you to eat as much as you want because it would make me so very happy, and you will feel so much better."

Olivia could tell that Lauren was thinking hard about she just said to her. A child that has been tramatized by so much makes it difficult sometimes to get them to change their state of mind because it's what they were told their whole lives. But Olivia was up for the challenge.

"Okay." Lauren says simply as she walks out of the room.

"One step at a time." Olivia says to herself before following Lauren out to the kitchen.

End
file.